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Item 10* of the provisional agenda**
Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes

Report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its thirty-second session

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its thirty-second session (New York, 16–18 June 1998). The report is transmitted to the Commission as requested at its twenty-ninth session.[1]

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4* (E/1997/24), chap. I, sect. A.

* The report is also relevant to the discussion under items 3–6 of the provisional agenda.
** E/CN.3/1999/1.

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Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its thirty-second session

(New York, 16–18 June 1998)

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I. Introduction

1. The ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities held its thirty-second session in New York from 16 to 18 June 1998. The agenda is contained in annex I below, the list of participants in annex II and the list of documents in annex III.

II. Matters for endorsement or approval of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions

2. The following matters are brought to the attention of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ):

(a) The Subcommittee reviewed the report of CCPOQ (ACC/1997/15, annex I, para. 9) and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC/1997/20, para. 27 (b)), in which the Subcommittee was requested to continue to give consideration to the request of the Task Force on the Enabling Environment that the United Nations Statistics Division develop an inventory of indicators produced by the United Nations system. The Subcommittee noted the increased interest of several missions in ensuring consistency between global indicators for measuring progress. In addition, the Subcommittee took note of the request of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs to the Statistics Division to facilitate the completion of a development indicators Web site. The Subcommittee reviewed and agreed with the paper prepared by the Statistics Division explaining why the existing inventory of statistical data-collection activities was not suitable for the development indicators Web site (SA/1998/9). In the light of those developments, the Subcommittee supported the establishment of the development indicators Web site. The Subcommittee welcomed the offer of the Statistics Division to provide substantive support to and work with the agencies in the preparation of their information for the Web site. The Subcommittee urged that in making judgements about the amount of material to be included in the Web site, the principle of parsimony be employed. It was agreed that initially the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) would work with the Statistics Division. The Subcommittee took note of and agreed with the proposals by the Statistics Division to also begin work on rationalization and harmonization through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process on indicators for the common country assessment, and to continue its work with the core indicators programme of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Subcommittee noted that harmonization was necessarily an incremental process. Finally, the Subcommittee agreed with the proposal that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs would begin discussions with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to determine the extent to which UNEP could provide leadership in the harmonization and rationalization in the area of environmental indicators;

(b) The Subcommittee noted the intention of the Statistics Division to present to the Statistical Commission at its 1999 session the work plans of the international organizations on statistical methodology, based on information to be inputted by organizations into a Web page system designed by the Division as a result of a pilot study carried out by the Division, ILO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The Subcommittee noted that consultations were continuing between the Division and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) concerning ways of including the information that OECD, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) and ECE have already provided in the context of the integrated presentation of work plans for the Conference of European Statisticians (CES);

(c) The Subcommittee noted the work being done by the Information Systems Coordination Committee on developing a United Nations system extranet (inter-agency Internet). Limited operational coverage was expected by the end of 1998 but a full production environment was expected around mid-1999. A number of technical, organizational, planning, managerial and basic objectives questions were raised and discussed. The Subcommittee agreed that, before proceeding any further, members would need to consult their own focal points for this project in their own organizations on whether and how they might contribute to the project and how it might be of value in their statistics-related work;

(d) The Subcommittee decided that, immediately following the thirty-second session, the Bureau should comprise: H. Habermann (Statistics Division, ex officio, term: permanent); J.-M. Leger (World Trade Organization, term ends 1999); F. Mehran (ILO, former Chairman, term ends 2000); A. Flatt (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), term ends 2000);[1] G. Jones (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Chairman, term ends 2000). The Subcommittee requested that R. Roberts of

the Statistics Division continue to serve as Secretary of both the Subcommittee and its Bureau;

(e) The Subcommittee accepted an invitation from the World Tourism Organization to host the meeting of the Subcommittee in Madrid in 1999. The Subcommittee recommended that its thirty-third session be held from 14 to 16 September 1999 at the headquarters of the World Tourism Organization in Madrid. The provisional agenda, subject to review and finalization by the Bureau, was agreed as follows:

Provisional agenda and documentation for the thirty-third session of the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
2. Adoption of the report of the Subcommittee on its thirty-second session.
3. Matters arising from the thirty-second session of the Subcommittee (reports of the Bureau on its intersessional meetings; note by the Secretariat on follow-up to the thirty-second session).
4. Classification of statistics and statistical activities (report by ILO and ESCAP).
5. Environment statistics (report by the Statistics Division).
6. Presentation of the work plans of the international organizations in statistical methodology (report by the Statistics Division).
7. Issues related to the work of the task forces (reports by the task forces).
8. Indicator project (report by the Statistics Division).
9. Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group (report by the Statistics Division).
10. ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections (report of the Subcommittee).
11. Bureau of the Subcommittee.
12. Dates, place and agenda of the thirty-fourth session of the Subcommittee.

III. Work of the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities

A. Adoption of the report of the Subcommittee on its thirty-first session

3. The Subcommittee adopted the report on its thirty-first session.

B. Matters arising from the thirty-first session of the Subcommittee

1. Review of the experiment on holding occasional part-day sessions on a special topic with an invited guest

4. The Subcommittee endorsed the view of the Bureau that the session on preparing budget proposals relating to statistical activities in the United Nations system, held during the thirty-first session, had been a good one, that the reaction of members had been positive and that the subject had been worthwhile. The Bureau considered that it was important to select topics carefully and that topics should be quite specific to the interests and needs of the Subcommittee (see SA/1998/2, para. 7).

2. Responding to requests from the Statistical Commission

5. The Subcommittee endorsed the view of the Bureau that, in response to requests by the Statistical Commission, the Director of the Statistics Division could make commitments for that organization but not for others, and urged individual organizations to speak their views on requests at the time they were made by the Statistical Commission (see SA/1998/3, para. 8).

C. Issues related to the work of the task forces

1. Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts

6. The Subcommittee noted the progress of work in the areas of addressing conceptual issues, defining an updating process for the 1993 System of National Accounts and implementing the new data questionnaire for national accounts. The Subcommittee noted that there were no major outstanding coordination issues.

2. Task Force on International Trade Statistics

7. The Task Force took note of the work done by the Subcommittee and the report on the meeting of the Task Force held in Brussels on 25 and 26 February 1998. The Task Force had carried out work in the following areas: methodological development, index numbers, coordination of data collection and data sharing among members of the Task Force, possible rationalization of the commodity trade statistics database maintained by the Statistics Division, price and volume index numbers, and a report, as previously requested by the Subcommittee, on inconsistency between the reported imports and reported exports of trading partners.

3. Task Force on Finance Statistics

8. The Subcommittee welcomed the initiative of IMF as the convener of the Task Force to bring the issues of measurement and dissemination of data on international reserves and external debt to the attention of the Task Force. In particular, the Task Force was invited to draw on experiences with debt management systems and related data collection, which are available in various international agencies.

4. Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services

9. The Subcommittee took note of the planned schedule for completing the *Manual of Statistics on International Trade in Services*, which involved further review in detail by the Task Force at a meeting in November 1998, circulation worldwide beginning at the end of December 1998, and submission for approval by the Statistical Commission or its Working Group in 2000. A proposal has also been put forward by the Task Force for a United Nations expert group meeting to review the draft manual in June 1999; however, the question of whether, and the logistics of how the proposed expert group meeting would be conducted have not yet been decided.

10. The Task Force raised a question concerning authorship and attribution that should be applied to statistical publications that are jointly prepared by a number of agencies. The Subcommittee requested the Statistics Division to prepare a paper on the subject for review by the Subcommittee.

D. Environment statistics

11. The Subcommittee concluded that:

(a) Basic environment statistics was a generic term that needed to be clarified; the Subcommittee recommended that environment statistics concentrate on statistics on the natural environment;

(b) In some parts of this still very large area, there was positive progress, including:

(i) The development of a set of 50 indicators with or through the preparation of a questionnaire, including definitions and methodological concepts coordinated through the United Nations and OECD;

(ii) Development of environmental accounting through the London Group on environmental accounting;

(c) Many parts of environment statistics were still immature – more like a scientific development area. In such a situation:

(i) It was counter-productive to limit options now;

(ii) There were also many major players outside the national statistical offices;

(d) There was too much concentration on a supply-driven statistical base, and the demand side needed to be articulated;

(e) The Task Force on Environment Statistics was no longer necessary and sufficient coordination could be undertaken in the Subcommittee itself.

12. The Subcommittee recommended that the Statistics Division coordinate the preparation of a paper on those issues for the Statistical Commission, in collaboration with OECD, EUROSTAT, UNEP, the World Bank and the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

E. Classification of statistics and statistical activities

13. The Subcommittee noted that the statistics part of the ACC classification and the classification used in the integrated presentation of statistical programmes of ECE, OECD and EUROSTAT served different purposes. The Subcommittee agreed that the two classifications should correspond with each other and, as far as possible, correspondence between them should be maintained over time. The Subcommittee requested ILO and ESCAP to work together and prepare a concrete proposal for the minor changes needed to bring the classifications into correspondence, circulate the proposal to members of the

Subcommittee for comment and provide the amended proposal to the Chairman of the Subcommittee, with a short note explaining the background, what had been done and the results. The Subcommittee agreed that the Chairman would forward the proposal to the Chairman of CES for consideration.

F. Special Data Dissemination Standard and General Data Dissemination System of the International Monetary Fund and implications for technical assistance

14. The Subcommittee noted the progress in implementing the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) and the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS), the difference between the two (the former being a standard and the latter a system), and the series of regional workshops to be organized by IMF in support of the implementation of GDDS. The Subcommittee emphasized that cooperation and coordination of the relevant statistical agencies present at the meeting would be needed in that effort, in particular in the further development of GDDS with regard to social and environmental data.

15. The Subcommittee recognized the positive impact of the IMF initiative towards the long-term goal of improving data quality; in particular, the potential of GDDS to serve as a master plan for statistical development was mentioned. It was observed that in some economies care needed to be taken in using quarterly accounts for monitoring purposes. The importance of providing sufficient and coordinated technical assistance to support the implementation of the data initiative was emphasized.

G. Coordination of the follow-up to the statistical implications of recent major United Nations conferences; inventory of all indicators produced by the United Nations system

16. For the discussion, see paragraph 2 (a) above.

H. Coordination of statistical data-collection activities

17. The Subcommittee noted the conclusion of the Statistical Commission's Working Group that the number of instances of duplication reported by countries to the Chairman of the Working Group was small, and that there was no indication of a major problem in this area at the present time (E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 32). The Subcommittee also noted that its members were continuing to work to reduce reporting burdens on countries, and that the issue was already the subject of annual reporting to CES. The Subcommittee agreed that it would return to the issue at any time that a particular problem might arise.

I. Reporting to the Statistical Commission on the work plans of the international organizations in statistical methodology

18. For the discussion, see paragraph 2 (b) above.

J. Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group

19. The Subcommittee noted the work being undertaken for the 1999 session of the Statistical Commission in the following areas: (a) demographic, social and migration statistics; (b) international economic and social classification; (c) evaluation of the International Comparison Programme (ICP); (d) technical cooperation; (e) role and functioning of the Statistical Commission; (f) best practices for official statistics; and (g) evaluation of work in selected fields of statistics. The Subcommittee noted and encouraged the collaboration and inputs from its members. The Subcommittee also noted that, under other items of its agenda, appropriate collaboration on preparations for the Statistical Commission was being undertaken.

K. Special topic: "The electronic store"

20. The Subcommittee welcomed the presentation on the above topic made by Mr. L. Goelzer, Head of the Information Services Department of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The presentation covered (a) general information on the nature and growth of electronic commerce, (b) current and planned electronic commerce activities at ITU, (c) the ITU project on consumer electronic commerce for developing countries and (d) security for transactions in electronic commerce. The Subcommittee noted that ITU was discussing with a number of United Nations and other organizations the possibility of ITU hosting electronic commerce for those organizations.

A lively question-and-answer and discussion session followed and members expressed considerable interest in further developments. The Chairman thanked Mr. Goelzer on behalf of the Subcommittee, concluding that it had been an interesting and informative presentation of an issue that was of great interest to members of the Subcommittee.

L. Other business

1. Population census activities

21. The Subcommittee took note of the draft resolution to the Economic and Social Council prepared by the Commission on Population and Development at its thirty-first session,[2] following expressions of concern by the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination concerning the importance of population census activities for evaluating progress in implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (E/CN.3/1999/20, paras. 14-18). The Subcommittee also welcomed the continued collaboration and coordination efforts between the Statistical Commission and the Commission on Population and Development in this vital matter.

2. ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections

22. The Subcommittee noted that the work of the Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections in the past year had focused on the 1998 revision of demographic projections and that the results would be available around October 1998. The Subcommittee further noted that the Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections would hold its next session in the week of 22 June 1998 and that EUROSTAT and the International Organization on Migration would participate as observers. The Secretary of the Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections reconfirmed that the question of participation of observers in its sessions was handled according to ACC rules which permitted the Subcommittee itself to determine which organizations might participate as observers.

3. World Trade Deflator System of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

23. The Subcommittee noted the work being undertaken by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on its World Trade Deflator System, which was designed to calculate deflators for 5,000 commodity groups at the six-digit level of the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS). Several members expressed interest in the results of that work and in collaborating in its further development.

4. Priorities for a United Nations system extranet

24. For the discussion, see paragraph 2 (c) above.

Notes

[1] Elected for a second term of two years.

[2] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 5* (E/1998/25), chap. I, sect. A.

Annex I

Agenda

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
2. Adoption of the report of the Subcommittee on its thirty-first session.
3. Matters arising from the thirty-first session of the Subcommittee.
4. Issues related to the work of the task forces.
5. Environment statistics.
6. Classification of statistics and statistical activities.
7. Special Data Dissemination Standard and General Data Dissemination System of the International Monetary Fund and implications for technical assistance.
8. Coordination of the follow-up to the statistical implications of recent major United Nations conferences.
9. Inventory of all indicators produced by the United Nations system.
10. Coordination of statistical data-collection activities.
11. Reporting to the Statistical Commission on the work plans of the international organizations on statistical methodology.
12. Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group.
13. Special topic: "The electronic store".
14. Other business:
    (a) Population census statistics;
    (b) ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections;
    (c) World Trade Deflator System of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development;
    (d) Priorities for a United Nations system extranet;
    (e) Bureau of the Subcommittee;
    (f) Dates, place and agenda of the thirty-third session.
15. Report of the Subcommittee on its thirty-second session.

Annex II

List of participants

United Nations entities and programmes

Department of Economic and Social Affairs	
Statistics Division	H. Habermann R. Roberts (Secretary) P. Bartelmus G. Bediako M. Chamie C. Hannig O. Jackson R. Johnston A. Me S. Schweinfest
Division for Sustainable Development	L. Flanders
Population Division	J. Chamie B. Bucht
Economic Commission for Europe	T. Griffin
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	A. Flatt
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	P. Sainz
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	L. Abdunnur
United Nations Children's Fund	G. Jones
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	O. Gulbrandsen
United Nations Development Programme	G. Tanghe-Gulluova S. Jahan L. Mourino-Casas
United Nations Environment Programme	A. Dahl
United Nations Population Fund	K. Nacro

Specialized agencies

International Labour Organization	F. Mehran
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	L. Naiken

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	G. Nascimento
World Health Organization	H. R. Hapsara
World Bank	S. Badiee M. Ward E. Swanson
International Monetary Fund	C. Carson
United Nations Industrial Development Organization	T. Yamada

Other international and non-governmental organizations

Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States	M. Korolev
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	A. Harrison
Statistical Office of the European Communities	J. Whitworth
World Trade Organization	J.-M. Leger

Inter-agency organizations

Information Systems Coordination Committee	J. Northcut
ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections	J. Grinblat

Annex III

List of documents

Document No.	Agenda item	Title or description
SA/1998/1	1	Provisional agenda
SA/1998/1/Add.1	1	Proposed organization of work
SA/1998/2	3	Report of the Bureau on its meeting of 18 September 1997
SA/1998/3	3	Report of the Bureau on its meeting of 12 February 1998
SA/1998/4	3	Note by the Secretariat on follow-up to the thirty-first session
SA/1998/5	4	Extract from the report of the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination on its nineteenth session, held in New York from 10 to 12 February 1998, containing its discussion on the work of the task forces
SA/1998/6	6	The statistics part of the ACC programme classification: report by ESCAP and ILO
SA/1998/7	8	Not issued
SA/1998/8	8	Not issued
SA/1998/9	9	Report by the Statistics Division on whether the "inventory of statistical data collection activities" can meet the objectives intended to be met by the "inventory of all indicators produced in the United Nations system"
SA/1998/10	12	Report by the Statistics Division on decisions and requests of the Commission and Working Group relevant to the work of the Subcommittee
SA/1998/11	5	Issued as an unnumbered document entitled "The environment and statistics"

Document No.	Agenda item	Title or description
ACC/1997/16	2	Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its thirty-first session, held at Geneva from 16 to 18 September 1997
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.2 E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.11	4	Reports of the task forces to the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session, held in New York from 10 to 12 February 1998
Unnumbered	4	Report of the Task Force on International Trade Statistics on its meeting, held in Brussels on 25 and 26 February 1998
Unnumbered	4	Report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts Technical-level Meeting, New York, 15–16 April 1998
Unnumbered	5	Coordination of environment statistics – problems, actions and expected results: note by the Statistics Division
Unnumbered	5	The environment and statistics: note by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (see SA/1998/11)
Unnumbered	5	Synopsis of programmes and activities in environmental statistics, indicators and accounting, 15 June 1998: note by the Statistics Division
Unnumbered	7	Information on the General Data Dissemination System and the Special Data Dissemination Standard of the International Monetary Fund. Available on the IMF Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board at http://dsbb.imf.org (not issued in hard-copy version for the Subcommittee session)
Unnumbered	8, 9	Harmonization and rationalization of development indicators – problem statement and steps towards a solution: note prepared by the Statistics Division for the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs

Document No.	Agenda item	Title or description
Unnumbered	8, 9	Extract from the minutes of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (10th meeting, 16 May 1998), on harmonization and rationalization of development indicators
Unnumbered	8, 9	Requests by CCPOQ and ACC to the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on indicators
CES/1998/17	10	Joint data collection, 1997/98 update: note by ECE, Eurostat and OECD
Unnumbered	13	Consumer electronic commerce; copies of slide presentation by the International Telecommunication Union
Unnumbered	13	Consumer electronic commerce for developing countries – an ITU pilot project
-*Unnumbered	14 (a)	Draft resolution adopted by the Commission on Population and Development at its thirty-first session (23–27 February 1998) on the importance of population census activities for evaluation of progress in implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development
Unnumbered	14 (c)	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, HS-based World Trade Deflator System, including selected results for the period 1988–1996
Unnumbered	14 (d)	Priorities for a United Nations-system extranet – report on survey results and recommendations (prepared by a consultant for the Information Systems Coordination Committee)